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Birdwatching for Dummies by Bill Thompson Iii

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REVIEWS

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Birdwatching for Dummies.—Bill Thompson III, 1997. IDG Books Worldwide. New York, New York. ISBN 0-7645-5040-3. 360 pages. \$19.99 paper.—It had to happen sooner or later, the “for dummies” series has come to birdwatching! Bill Thompson III, Editor of *Bird Watcher’s Digest*, presents a lively, informative guide to a pursuit an estimated 85 million Americans enjoy.

As the title implies, the author assumes little about the reader’s knowledge, for which beginning birders will be grateful, but which more advanced birders may find a trifle boring. Thompson’s book begins with such basics as defining what a bird is, describing how different species of birds are classified and named and provides some introductory information on the basic philosophy of birdwatching.

Thompson then proceeds to discuss the basic equipment and methods of birdwatching. He discusses binoculars and field guides, including tips on how to make the best use of both of them. Especially informative for the beginner are discussions of field marks and field identification techniques, including useful discussion of using a bird’s behavior as an identification tool.

Subsequent chapters include how to attract and feed birds at your home and how to provide nest boxes designed for the preferences of different species. The final chapters expand on lessons presented earlier in the book, such as more in-depth discussions of optics, bird identification, and bird finding. This latter discussion is useful because it discusses the often overlooked, but the critical relationship between birds and their habitats. Of particular importance is a discussion of how amateur birdwatchers can assist professional ornithologists through volunteering their skills to collect data about species distributions and abundances through such activities as Breeding Bird Surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, and even activities such as developing checklists for local parks or assisting at bird rehabilitation centers. This is a well-needed reinforcement because many wildlife monitoring projects in Florida demand skilled volunteers to collect these important data.

Thompson sprinkles the text with information boxes on subjects you never learn in basic bird identification courses, such as the best way to dry a wet field guide, how to turn the mess under your bird feeder into compost, and how to plan a birding field trip.

All of the information in this book is enhanced by copious illustrations. There is a color spread in the middle of the book with some photos of particularly striking birds and illustrations of birds in their habitats. The book also includes an appendix and an index, which enhances the value for everyone.

This book is a useful general reference for personal use and a valuable guide to educators. Providing well-organized and thorough information presented in a light and accessible style.—**Tom Palmer**, 1805 26th St., NW, Winter Haven, Florida 33881.